



Just the Facts

57-008-0394

...About Measles



Measles is a serious and highly contagious infection caused by a virus. It used to be a very common childhood infection. In recent years, 3,000 to 28,000 cases of measles have been reported yearly in the United States, and outbreaks still occur.

Children with measles usually have a high fever, cough, runny nose, and red eyes. After a few days, a rash appears. The rash starts out as a few red spots, which soon join together and cover the body.

The infection can make children very ill, and hospitalization may be necessary. Some children may get an ear infection or pneumonia. On rare occasions measles may cause brain damage. Adults who get measles are usually very sick, and the infection often leads to complications such as pneumonia.

The measles virus is very contagious and spreads easily from person to person through the air. The virus is infectious from about 3 to 5 days before the rash appears and up to 4 days after the rash appears. Almost everyone exposed who has not been immunized or who has not already had measles will get the infection.

If a child has not been immunized and is exposed to measles, an injection of immune globulin can prevent the infection. Immune globulin contains antibodies, substances that can prevent infection. Contact your physician if an unvaccinated child is exposed to measles.

No medication cures measles. Antibiotics have no effect because measles is caused by a virus. The measles vaccine is given at 15 months of age.

Things Parents Can Do

- ◆ If you or your child have been in contact with anyone diagnosed with measles, check immunization records to see if you and your child have had the measles or the measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccine. If your child has had the measles or the MMR vaccine, it is very unlikely that he or she will develop measles if exposed to another child with the infection.
- ◆ If your child has already had measles diagnosed with a blood test by a physician, do not take your child for a vaccination.
- ◆ If your child has not had the measles or the MMR vaccine, contact your physician or Preventive Medicine Service. Your physician or Preventive Medicine Service will tell you if your child needs a measles vaccination or an injection of immune globulin. Your child must get one of these immunizations before returning to the child care facility. If your child does not get either a measles vaccination or an injection of immune globulin, he or she will have to remain out of child care for 2 weeks after the last case of measles in the child care facility has occurred.

You can prevent measles by immunization.

◆ Child Care Facilities

◆ Information

◆ Immunization

For additional information contact your local health consultant or health care provider.

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